

Message Text

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SUBJECT: SINGAPORE PRESS AND PUBLIC REACTION TO DEATH OF RAZAK

SUMMARY:

DEATH OF MALAYSIAN PM TUN RAZAK RECEIVED BLANKET MEDIA
COVERAGE USUALLY ASSOCIATED WITH A COUNTRY'S OWN
NATIONAL TRAGEDY AND PROVIDED CLEAR ILLUSTRATION OF
VITAL IMPORTANCE TO SINGAPORE OF MAJOR DEVELOPMENTS IN
MALAYSIA. SORROW OVER LOSS OF RAZAK'S LEADERSHIP
AND CONCERN OVER MALAYSIA'S UNCERTAIN FUTURE WERE
FULLY REFLECTED IN PUBLIC AND OFFICIAL REACTION.
END SUMMARY.

1. RAZAK'S DEATH WAS FIRST ANNOUNCED ON THE MALAYSIAN
PENINSULA BY RADIO SINGAPOR AT 9 A.M. JANUARY 14.
IT WAS ANNOUNCED OVER MALAYSIAN RADIO-TV AT 10:45 P.M.
ONE OF THE FIRST CONDOLENCE MESSAGES WAS THAT SENT
BY PRIME MINISTER LEE KUAN YEW TO DATUK HUSSEIN ONN THAT EVENING. IT
READ: QUOTE MY COLLEAGUES AND I ARE DEEPLY GRIEVED
TO HEAR YOU ANNOUNCE THE DEATH OF TUN ABDUL RAZAK
OVER THE RADIO TONIGHT. HE WAS AN OUTSTANDING AND
RESPECTED LEADER. HIS CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE
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INDEPENDENCE AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF MALAYSIA AND HER

PEOPLE IS A SIGNIFICANT PART OF MALAYSIAN HISTORY. SEVERAL OF MY SENIOR COLLEAGUES AND I WERE HIS CLOSE FRIENDS FROM OUR STUDENT DAYS. WE ALL FEEL A SENSE OF PERSONAL LOSS OVER HIS DEPARTURE. OUR DEEPEST SYMPATHIES GO TO HIS WIFE TOH PUAN RAHAH AND HIS FAMILY AND TO YOU AND YOUR CABINET COLLEAGUES. END QUOTE. SINGAPORE ORDERED ALL FLAGS TO FLY AT HALF MAST.

2. GOS DELEGATION TO THE FUNERAL HEADED BY PM LEE AND INCLUDED FORMIN RAJARATNAM AND MINISTER FOR HEALTH TOH CHIN CHYE. IN REMARKS ON HIS ARRIVAL IN KL, LEE REITERATED THAT RAZAK WAS AN "OLD AND GOOD FRIEND" TO MANY OF SINGAPORE'S LEADERS AND HIS DEATH WAS A "DEEP LOSS". "WE WORKED TOGETHER IN ASEAN AND HIS DEATH IS A GREAT TRAGEDY," LEE SAID.

3. RAZAK' DEATH AND FUNERAL ARRANGEMENTS WERE LEAD STORIES IN JANUARY 15 AND 16 EDITIONS OF CHINESE AND ENGLISH LANGUAGE PRESS, THE LATTER GIVING MORE EXTENSIVE COVERAGE. FIRST DAY EDITORIALS CITED RAZAK'S CONTRIBUTIONS TO MALAYSIA'S DEVELOPMENT. THE PAPERS COMMENDED HIS POLICIES OF RACIAL AND SOCIAL JUSTICE FOR ALL. THE STRAITS TIMES SAID THAT HIS DEATH " COULD NOT HAVE COME AT A MORE INOPPORTUNE TIME," POINTING OUT THAT MALAYSIA FACES A RENEWED COMMUNIST INSURGENCY AND ECONOMIC DIFFICULTIES.

4. SECOND DAY EDITORIAL COMMENT AND OP-ED PAGES FOCUSED ON DATUK HUSSEIN ONN, RAZAK'S SUCCESSOR. HE WAS DESCRIBED IN THE STRAITS TIMES AS "A MAN OF UNQUESTIONED INTEGRITY, STRONG BELIEFS AND DEEP PRINCIPLES, MOVED BY AN INTENSE SENSE OF DUTY --A PERFECT-IONIST -- WHO STANDS WELL IN THE EYES OF NON-MALAYS." BUT THE PAPER EXPRESSED CONCERN ABOUT HIS HEALTH (A HEART PROBLEM) AND SAID THAT BECAUSE HE SHUNS PERSONAL PUBLICITY AND IS A SHY, RETICENT MAN, HIS PERSONAL LIFE AND BACKGROUND REMAIN "VERY MUCH A MYSTERY TO MANY MALAYSIANS AFTER ALL THE YEARS IN PUBLIC LIFE."

COMMENT: THE EXTENT OF PUBLIC AND OFFICIAL REACTION IN SINGAPORE REFLECTS THE CLOSE TIES AS WELL AS THE DEEP LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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CONCERN OF SINGAPOREANS FOR WHAT THEY SEE AS MALAYSIA'S UNCERTAIN FUTURE. THE GOS HAD ALREADY QUESTIONED MALAYSIA'S ABILITY TO DEAL WITH ITS NUMEROUS AND SERIOUS PROBLEMS. OF PARTICULAR CONCERN TO SINGAPORE ARE THE REVIVED COMMUNIST INSURGENCY, THE STRAIN OF A BUMIPUTRA POLICY ON A MULTI-RACIAL SOCIETY, THE RECENT POLITICAL STRUGGLES WITHIN UMNO, AND THE RISE OF ECONOMIC NATIONALISM.

GIVEN GOS PENCHANT FOR SUBSCRIBING TO THE BLEAKEST
SCENARIO IN ANY CRISIS, THE LOSS OF RAZAK'S MODERATE
LEADERSHIP AT THIS TIME CAN ONLY ADD TO THEIR
PESSIMISM.
GRANT

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